

## ETHICS AND ECONOMICS

### Driven by Hope: Economics and Theology in Dialogue

**Steven C. van den Heuvel and Patrick Nullens (Editors)**

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Most people probably do not think of economists and theologians as natural partners in dialogue. Regular readers of this journal, however, are likely to grasp the many benefits of interaction between these two groups. *Driven by Hope: Economics and Theology in Dialogue* is the fruit of a project initiated by two research institutes: the Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organization and the Institute for Leadership and Social Ethics. The papers in this volume were presented in 2017 at a conference in Belgium that focused on the concept of hope as a unifying principle for economic activity. Several economists and theologians participated in the conference, almost all of whom lived in Europe at that time or were educated there. As with many conference proceedings collections, the result is a mix of many ideas, some strong and some less so.

The volume has three distinctive features. The most unique is the book's examination, from a variety of perspectives, of hope and its importance for economic theory and practice. Second, the book discusses a quantifiable measure of hope within an economic context. Finally, after separate sections on economic and theological perspectives, the third section of the book presents several case studies.

The first paper in the "Economic Perspectives" section focuses on understanding and measuring hope. Martijn Burger and three coauthors quickly review how hope has been viewed in a variety of disciplines, including economics, and suggest that the social sciences increasingly view hope as a subject of study. They assert the necessity of hope and suggest that "previous research shows that having a hopeful disposition has many positive correlates" (10). The authors proceed to develop a method to measure hope, what

they call the Hope Barometer 1.0. They then describe the result of a pilot study applying this measure to 515 Dutch citizens, and examine the relationship between employment, education, and income, and their impact on hope. The methodology in the study is unique, and it makes the case for the importance of hope in economic outcomes.

In the same section of the volume, Emilio Di Somma explores the relationship between hope and “economic faith.” He differentiates between what he describes as “passive” and “active” hope, suggesting that active hope is what “calls us into action; it compels us to conform our actions and values to a general structure” (87). To illustrate his concept of hope Di Somma considers the experience of the character Chris Gardner in the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, and suggests that Gardner acts out of an active hope in the ultimate fairness of the economic system.

Three other chapters round out this section on economic perspectives. In the first chapter, Lans Bovenberg attempts to reframe economics as “a discipline of hope.” He proposes that economics education should be extended to include more “relational” models of exchange than what he believes are normally implied by the concept of *homo economicus*. In the second chapter, Luk Bouckaert maintains that hope has a dual nature that includes both spiritual hope and rational hope. He argues for the priority of spiritual hope, and makes a case for an ethic of frugality as an additional organizing principle for economic life. He suggests that frugality allows humankind to enjoy better the intrinsic value of things, and that it “fosters a relational culture” (77). In the third chapter, Luigino Bruni examines the relationship between hope and what he calls “the paradox of merit” (49).

Four papers constitute the section entitled “Theological Perspectives.” They focus on hope and its relation to economics in the writings of four different authors (successively): Jacques Ellul, John Wesley, Emil Brunner, and Edward Schillebeeckx. A standout essay in this section is by Michael Borowski, who examines some of the barriers to dialogue between theologians and economists and develops a framework that can promote such discussions. Borowski describes John Wesley’s thinking on economic matters as “material for evangelical theological reflection” (107). He also reviews H. Richard Niebuhr’s five types (concerning the relationship between Christianity and culture) and suggests that one of these types requires interaction between theology and economics.

As mentioned earlier, one of the unique features of this volume is the presence of case studies involving various aspects of hope. Two of them are particularly interesting. Steven C. van den Heuvel (a coeditor of the book) examines the importance of hope for human development. His paper examines closely Travis Lybbert and Bruce Wydick’s framework for analyzing hope in this context. Van den Heuvel asserts that hope is too frequently regarded as an individual phenomenon, and he suggests that Lybbert and Wydick missed two crucial elements of hope, which he describes as hope’s social and moral dimensions. Van den Heuvel cites research from Ethiopia that found that groups had significantly better outcomes on a variety of development measures if they had engaged in activities that raised the group’s level of social hope (e.g., together watching a video documentary in which successful regional farmers recount their experiences).

In a second case study, Joseph Bosco Bangura writes on the role of Pentecostalism in economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. While it is frequently argued that religiosity can impede “progress” of various types, this author makes a positive case for the impact of Pentecostalism on Africa’s economic future. He asserts that it can promote entrepreneurship, hard work, and have a positive impact on family structure issues. He also states that Pentecostalism stresses hope, and that hope can spur a movement out of poverty.

There are three other papers in the case-study section. Jack Barentsen examines the role of hope in leadership, positing that leaders can be “harbingers of hope” (153). A particular focus of this paper is how the vision of hope that a leader expresses may include or exclude groups or categories of people—which is particularly relevant given the current fractured political situation in the United States. A second paper explores the role of hope in social entrepreneurship, particularly in regard to social exclusion; author Pavel Chalupnicek suggests that scholars who examine social entrepreneurship have given short shrift to the idea of hope, perhaps because they tend to emphasize the related idea of empowerment. Finally, H. H. Drake Williams III tackles the rather unexpected topic of torture, contrasting a Stoic posture with one that emphasizes hope in Christ, as expressed in the letters of the early church father Ignatius.

I will admit that when I first picked up *Driven by Hope*, I was somewhat skeptical of what it might include. However, although it ranges quite widely, I found this volume to be quite thought-provoking. In a world that often seems short on hope, and that focuses on the negative, it is genuinely refreshing to read about hope and its relation to economics. As a professor of economics at a place called Hope College, I especially appreciate the book’s focus on hope as an important factor in our economic activity. We can remember the words of 1 Timothy 6:17 (NASB): “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”

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## Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence

**Rachel Sherman**

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“We know very little about what it is like to *be* wealthy in the current historical moment,” writes sociologist Rachel Sherman. “Contemporary scholarly accounts of elite experience are in short supply, due largely to the difficulty of gaining access to wealthy people” (11). To address this gap, Sherman interviewed fifty wealthy individuals in her hometown of New York City and published her findings in the recent monograph *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence*.

The book is part sociology, part psychology, and part discourse analysis. Sherman’s general goal is to understand the *mechanisms of legitimating economic inequalities*. What